

HUNGARY

ICOMOS Hungary's "Historic Preservation Lemon Awards"

The Hungarian National Committee of ICOMOS – in accordance with ICOMOS's international efforts – makes a point of drawing attention to Hungarian cultural heritage in danger, in an attempt to save it. To further this goal the Hungarian National Committee established the "Historic Preservation Lemon Awards" in 2005. Nominations for this "negative distinction" may be made every spring. A jury made up of the best Hungarian experts – art historians and architects – judges which buildings were put at greatest risk by thoughtless owners, and where the most serious mistakes were made during rehabilitation projects. Three endangered buildings are put in the spotlight every year.

Up until now the awards have been given out twice, in 2005 and 2006. The historic preservation experts want to draw the attention of society to threatened historic buildings through the presentation of these regrettable examples. The announcement of the awards occurs during the annual meeting of the Hungarian National Committee of ICOMOS, which has been held for the last two years in conjunction with the International Day for Monuments and Sites. On both occasions the Lemon Awards produced a significant reaction from the press and the media. The efforts of ICOMOS Hungary have proven effective, as the fate of more than one of the poorly cared-for buildings highlighted in previous years has taken a turn for the better. This shows that presenting these unfortunate examples does provide effective encouragement for the preservation of endangered heritage sites, and so it is worthwhile to become familiar with a brief history of these buildings and their difficult fortunes.

Frigyes Barracks (Győr, 42 Baross Gábor St.) Schlichter Family Villa (Győr, houses at 12 Eszperantó Street and numbers 1, 3, 5 and 7 Zrínyi Street)

The Frigyes Barracks were built in Győr's new town center in 1897 according to the urban planning concept of the well-known Hungarian architect, Ignác Alpár. The buildings within this complex were constructed around a large, symmetrical central square. The ballroom, library and clubrooms located in the officer's building were an important site for the cultural life of the city. In the enlisted men's buildings there were large performance halls – music, fencing and lecture rooms – in addition to the dormitory rooms. The barracks were carefully constructed, utilizing the best technical and architectural knowledge of the time.

For a long time the buildings were used by the occupying Soviet forces. When these forces withdrew (in 1989) the buildings were in an acceptable state, with the exception of their façades. The municipal government of Győr requested and received the Frigyes Barracks back from the State, to be used for educational purposes. The municipal government handed the valuable buildings over to the local Universitas Győr Foundation so that the local university could be expanded. The directors of the Foundation then thoughtlessly and foolishly put the valuable complex up for sale and "privatized" it. The buyer – an Austrian-owned building contractor –



Győr, 42 Baross Gábor St., Frigyes Barracks (1897)



Győr, 12 Eszperantó Street, and numbers 1, 3, 5 and 7 Zrínyi Street, Schlichter Family Villa (1898)

Szentendre, 5 Kossuth Street, Pajor House (18th-19th centuries)



planned on demolishing the structures, and wanted to build cheap, speculative apartment houses on the site of these valuable buildings. No efforts were made to preserve the existing buildings.

The “key building” of the complex, the natural focal point and gateway to the surrounding Nádorváros neighborhood, was rightfully placed upon the Hungarian register of historic monuments. However, this did not settle its fate. The complex changed hands again in the middle of the 1990s. The new investor wanted to create a huge shopping mall in place of this complex, along with a long-distance bus terminal and the Schlichter Villa across. Thankfully to this day these plans have not yet been realized. In the first years of the new millennium the barracks buildings that were expertly constructed with funding from the citizens of the town still stood admirably, but their condition has deteriorated to a worrisome degree due to weathering.

The former Schlichter Villa and office building stands in the area between the barracks and the international railway station. The magnificent building was constructed at the end of the 19th century at the same time as the barracks complex. Its appearance follows the picturesque style of late Historicism. The turreted corner building is quite an important element in Győr’s cityscape. Rich stucco decoration is found in the interior of the two-story villa, and the ceiling of the banquet hall is decorated with paintings from 1898 by the outstanding Hungarian artist Erik Bánffy Pauly. The building complex received historic protection at the beginning of the 1990s. The house is owned by the municipal government of Győr and has been empty for years, with its condition visibly deteriorating. The owner has not provided for the simplest conservation steps that could be expected, and has no intention of providing it with a new function.

The dilapidated historic complex of the Frigyes Barracks and the former Schlichter Villa justly deserved the “Lemon Award” for 2005, as a result of fifteen years of incompetent management and no hope for re-use. Since then the fate of the complex has taken a turn for the better. The barracks buildings changed ownership again, and the new investor finally went about rehabilitating the buildings. The officer’s casino building has been renovated and the rehabilitation of the former junior officer’s dormitory is now under way. The relationship between the new owners and

the historic preservationists is not without conflict, but the precious building complex has in any case been spared demolition. On the other hand, the fate of the Schlichter Villa is still uncertain.

Szentendre, Pajor House, 5 Kossuth Street

The building of the former Pajor House – later the land registry – is located on one of Szentendre’s busy streets near numerous other historic monuments and protected historic buildings. This town has been an important site in Hungarian history, and these days it is the tourism center of the Danube Bend region. The building, which has seen better days, was placed upon the Hungarian register of historic monuments in 1958. It was built by the very wealthy Lovcsánszky family in the second half of the 18th century, and later in the second half of the 19th century the original owner’s grandson, Titusz Pajor, enlarged it. This was when it received its Historicist façade.

After the death of this owner a history full of ups and downs began for the building. From 1880 the building was a courthouse, and a jail was constructed in its enormous basement. In 1925 the Reformed Church bought it and used it as a higher elementary school and boarding school. During the Second World War the Rókus Hospital moved here from Budapest. In 1948 the house was placed under State ownership. From the 1950s it was first a police station, then the district council house, and finally in 1972 it became the land registry. In the 1980s the idea was raised to place the town’s historical collection here, but unfortunately this did not come about.

The land registry did not use the building for very long. Instead of rehabilitating it they built new office space. The fate of the empty building that had lost its function seemed to be sealed for good when it was given the “Lemon Award”. It was true that its function as the land registry had not been ideal, but at least it had been in use. It was also true that during this time periodic historic rehabilitations had not been performed, but at least this esteemed historic monument was heated and aired, and the most needed repairs were performed. After receiving the award the condition of the building has further deteriorated, and its salvation seems less and less likely.



Tura, Schossberger Palace (1883)

Tura, Schosberger Palace

The Schosberger Palace in Tura was built in 1883 according to the designs of Miklós Ybl, the most outstanding Hungarian master of the strict Neo-Renaissance style. The two-story building was constructed with an animated distribution of masses, an open carriage-way, a second-floor balcony and distinctive towers. Its seemingly sculpted masses, picturesque roof structure and richly molded chimneys followed the traditions of French Renaissance palace architecture, in accordance with the wishes of the client.

The enormous palace was built at about the same time as the Opera House on Andrásy Avenue in Pest, and the pronounced composition of its interior spaces is especially valuable. The interior spaces were designed in the spirit of the Italian Renaissance and represent Ybl's most mature architectural period. The client's wishes for an imposing building were met by the richly decorated carriage entrance. The elegant series of spaces including the entrance hall and staircase that led to the large parlor created a unique atmosphere. The building's frescoes were painted by Róbert Scholtz, who was Ybl's creative partner in some of the architect's other significant buildings.

After the Second World War the palace came into State ownership, and its management was entrusted to the local government. It was used as an orphanage for a long time, and during this period the preservation of its historic character was taken care of. After the orphanage was closed, the building's condition deteriorated dramatically. In 1981 it was run by a State-owned publishing house, and in 1991 it was privatized. The private owner prepared beautiful, exemplary plans for it, however these were not carried out. Now the building is without an owner and lies in ruins. First the roofing fell into disrepair, and now essentially every structural system is in critical condition. No steps have been taken since the award was given either, and it is feared that this palace of European significance may soon perish entirely.

Gávavancsellő, Dessewffy Palace

The prestigious Dessewffy family erected a magnificent palace in huge gardens that stretch to the banks of the Tisza River. A part of

the building was built in the Baroque style in the 18th century. This was later extended by an early Historicist, Classical Revival wing. In 1896 the complex was then remodeled following a unified design in the Neo-Baroque style. Over the last half century the building has been used for many different functions, but the managers of the esteemed monument have not provided for its proper maintenance. The fate of the building has become critical in the last decade. The palace gardens were partitioned and a large, ungainly mansion was built right next to the building. The low-quality new structure has been separated from the palace by a tall, massive fence. The historically significant palace building has completely lost its connection to its natural surroundings.

The Baroque wing of the palace is now in ruins. Only traces of the murals that decorated the interiors bear witness to the building's former high quality of workmanship. On the other hand the Classical Revival wing has been altered at significant cost and is now used as a disco. The stone cladding in the interior was covered with red paint so that the nightclub would have a more "modern" appearance. During the course of the alterations not even the most basic principles of historic rehabilitation were respected. The exterior façade was also painted in strident colors. The once magnificent palace can hardly be recognized in its altered form. It has lost its former architectural character, and its relationship to the surrounding natural landscape has been severed. The rehabilitation of this building is a sad example of a rehabilitation that was poorly planned and carried out.

Kecskemét, Malom Center

The cityscape of Kecskemét had preserved its unified appearance until recently. The characteristic urban structure had survived, and the scale of the city's buildings had not changed for quite a while. The city's skyline had also preserved its character and the natural surroundings of the protected buildings had remained unmarred.

A few years ago investors appeared in town, and their new projects caused drastic changes in the traditional appearance of the town. The greatest loss was the demolition of the historic complex of enormous mills which had great significance for the agricultural history of the area. The old mill buildings could have been modernized and



Gávavancsellő, Dessewffy Palace
(18th-19th centuries)

in their renovated form could have become a famous sight of the city. However, the investors were given a free hand by the town leaders to implement their designs, and instead of restoring the complex the old buildings were demolished. A shopping mall was constructed in the empty lot that was created by their removal. This new building complex overwhelms the city with its massive presence. The new structure does not fit into the urban structure that was formed through history, and it ignores the town's traditional scale.

The large mass of the building dwarfs the accents, such as the church steeples that had defined the cityscape. The formerly active, small-town streetscape is now dominated by tall, dreary walls. This new element provides a depressing picture from every point in the city. The huge masses of the building stretch upward, and have changed the atmosphere of the entire downtown. In addition, the shopping mall has put the survival of the traditional, lively little shops in the town center in danger. The unwanted transformation of Kecskemét's historic center is an example of what happens when city government gives way to the desires of the aggressively spreading "globalized" architectural methods of shopping malls, which completely destroy the historic character of our towns through their unchecked construction.

Budapest, 6th District, Apartment House at 40 Király Street

According to an unwritten rule of historic preservation, every building erected before 1875 is worthy of preservation. József Hild designed this imposing residence in 1844 for the wealthy Robitsek family on Pest's former main street. In the 1920s the building was enlarged to four stories, but the Neo-classical palace is still contained within its interior. The owner of the building, the district government, decided to demolish the precious building, citing its poor condition and the

Budapest, 6th District, 40 Király St. (1844, altered 1920)



high costs of renovation. The demolition of the building was begun on February 16th, 2006.

The building is located within the buffer zone of the Budapest World Heritage site. No repartitioning of lots or new construction exceeding the current scale is allowed to occur in this area. However, after the demolition of the building at 40 Király Street, plans were to unite its lot with that of the neighboring building on the corner. This would create an enormous unified lot, where the owners would like to erect a monstrous apartment house with 99 units that would not fit in with the traditional urban fabric. By doing this, the area would be built up two and a half times as densely, and the number of apartments would quadruple.

Civic groups organized a protest to rescue the outstanding old apartment house, and the demolition has stopped for the moment. However, the owners are neglecting the building, hoping that by accelerating its deterioration it will have to be demolished sooner or later. Not even the presentation of the "Lemon Award" has helped the situation.

The Hungarian National Committee of ICOMOS believes that the number of buildings at risk in Hungary is increasing, and therefore it has again announced "Historic Preservation Lemon Awards" for the year 2007.

Gábor Winkler
ICOMOS Hungary

The Improper Paths of Urban and Real Estate Development in Hungary

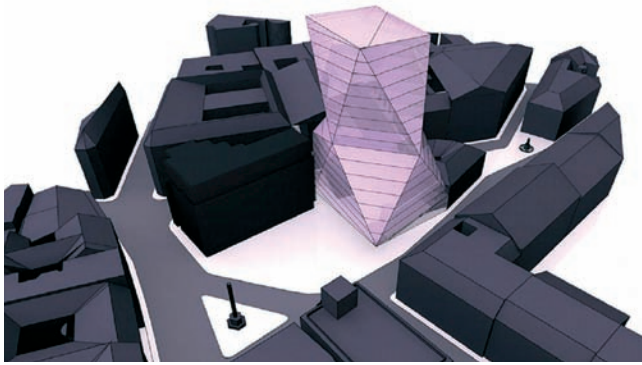
The erroneous analysis of the interrelations between historic sites and the utilitarian decisions made under the pretext of urban development seriously endanger the character of protected districts. Through the lack of an evaluation of their character and special requirements, misinterpreted examinations of the settings of historic sites may in many ways endanger our protected historic ensembles and the landscapes surrounding them. Unfortunately, more and more development programs are being created that damage the character of historic sites. The Hungarian National Committee of ICOMOS keeps track of the concepts and decisions related to the new developments to the best of its abilities. We make our positions public in statements and inform decision-makers directly of our views. If we can bring attention to unfortunate incidents, we may be able to avoid repeating them.

Central Budapest in Danger

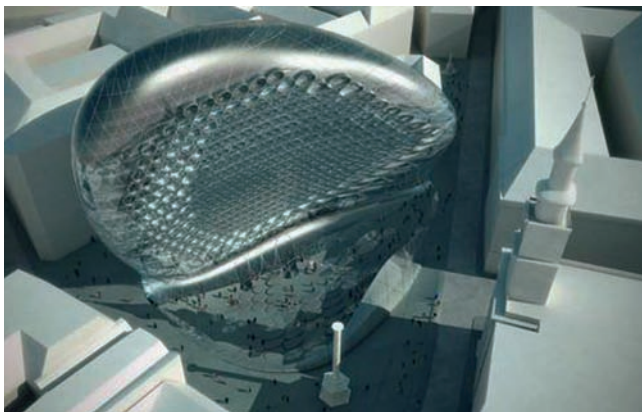
The areas of increasing value in the historic city center attract investors. The spectacular large-scale projects only accommodate themselves to their surroundings in the rarest of circumstances. In historic cities the most valuable areas are found in the city centers, the historic downtowns.

The developers attempt to erect the largest buildings with the greatest amount of ground space on the most valuable sites. Due to the lack of space in historic cities, they can only build upwards. Budapest has so far succeeded in avoiding the construction of skyscrapers.

As a consequence of the change in scale of urban architecture, skyscrapers have no consideration for the established urban conditions. It is not by accident that in many places these form an entirely



The first idea is a high-rise building next to the buffer zone of the Budapest World Heritage area



The second design is smaller, but still an enormous building in the historic urban structure of Budapest

new and separate district of the city. But even so, otherwise carefully fashioned and architecturally valuable buildings that are of enormous scale compared to the existing urban fabric can undermine a historic city. They rise above and dwarf the valuable buildings in the protected area, disrupting the urban fabric and ruining the cityscape. Developers step forward as ardent advocates of progress and modernity and often convince the municipal leaders by announcing that their ventures are a movement against outmoded conservatism.

The downtown area of Pest lying within the World Heritage site that encompasses the historic portion of Budapest may be jeopardized. The urban structure of Pest, which can be traced back to Roman times, and its characteristic development in the 19th and 20th centuries are a particularly important part of the Budapest World Heritage site.

Up until now the city authorities have for the most part been able to protect the essential character of the area. A projected real estate development, which had been poorly examined and clearly lacked restrictions for protecting the character of the area, proposed the construction of a skyscraper in downtown Pest at Szervita Square. Later this proposal was rejected due to fierce opposition, but now there are plans for the construction of an otherwise high-quality structure, which is however completely alien to the historic architecture and streetscape of the area.

The Example of the Big City is Contagious

An example of an overbearing new building destroying the harmony of an area is the *new* shopping mall in Kecskemét. The city is one of the most beautiful Art Nouveau towns on the Hungarian Plain. After the demolition of a valuable abandoned mill near the main square, a gigantic building was erected in its place, which ruined the skyline of



The townscape of Kecskemét



The townscape of Kecskemét with the new shopping mall

the city. The mall rises above the church steeples, completely dominating the cityscape. A basic requirement for new buildings is that they comply with the prescribed obligations to be integrated with their surroundings. All development that surpasses the established construction height adversely affects the cityscape, and therefore it should be prohibited.

Small Town Main Squares are at Risk

Many Hungarian towns have preserved their historic centers. In the best cases the local governments also believe that the protection of these centers is important. Ever greater attention is being given to the revival of historic main squares. However, the centers and protected districts of more and more of our historic cities are being threatened due to pretensions of grandeur and over-eager designers. Small Hungarian towns have essentially begun to compete with one another in thoroughly altering their main squares.

Work begun in the interest of revitalizing the towns – in many places with good intentions – has started a process of destroying the historic centers. Instead, the renovation of the historic city centers is increasingly serving to satisfy pretensions of grandeur that alter the character of the given town squares. Wild dreams have turned protected architectural districts into historical fantasylands. There is no doubt that the historic districts must serve the modern town, but this should not result in the loss of their authentic character. Authenticity demands that historic town squares be revitalized through their own historic character and status. It is not the presence of functions adapted to today's life that represents a threat, but instead that in many cases the display of hackneyed elements with no connection to the traditions or history of the town becomes the main objective. The determining approach for the rehabilitations is not the preservation of the historic district. Buildings completely discordant with their surroundings – historized fountains, bandstands and fake ruins, etc. – seem out of place.



The renewed chaotic main square of Vác



The renewed "Romanesque" gate in the authentic Baroque walls

These renovations generally arise from the support of international financial sources. Due to the strict deadlines and lack of resources during the preliminary planning period insufficiently prepared and investigated application materials are produced. When they are judged favorably the submitted plans may not be altered later, and the ensuing results of research cannot modify the plan. Subsequently, there is no opportunity to assert the professional principles of historic preservation or to make alterations on the basis of more thorough research. Therefore, a situation may arise where inaccurately identified medieval ruins are restored into something that was never there, and during the preservation of a Baroque square a huge imitation of a medieval city gate is erected, damaging a historic Baroque building.

Cultural Landscape at Risk: the Tokaj World Heritage Site is Endangered from Three Directions

In Szerencs, at the gateway to the World Heritage site listed as the Tokaj-Hegyalja Cultural Landscape, the construction of an enormous straw-burning power plant is being planned on land next to the main trunk road. This project has received every kind of support, as it will produce bio-energy and create jobs. A huge investment of this size has to be stopped because it is to be built at the gateway to a World Heritage site. Nobody has examined what effect the project would have on the World Heritage site.

The power plant is to be located at the worst place possible. The complex consisting of several massive block buildings is alien to the landscape. Certain portions of the generic planned complex will be 34 meters tall, or nearly 10 stories, a vulgar sight in an area protected as a World Heritage site. Its presence seriously endangers the preservation of the landscape's characteristic values, and the protection of the World Heritage site. The landscaping planned around the buildings as a result of protests is an insufficient solution. Nor has the fact that the planned power plant stands in direct conflict with the city of Szerencs's current regulatory plan, which only permits buildings of nine meters in the area, stopped it from going forward. The overpowering ambition and the funding that has come from far away have even forced the city into making damaging changes to its regulatory plan. The power plant's presence will seriously harm the Tokaj wine region World Heritage site, and it will become a blemish on the landscape.

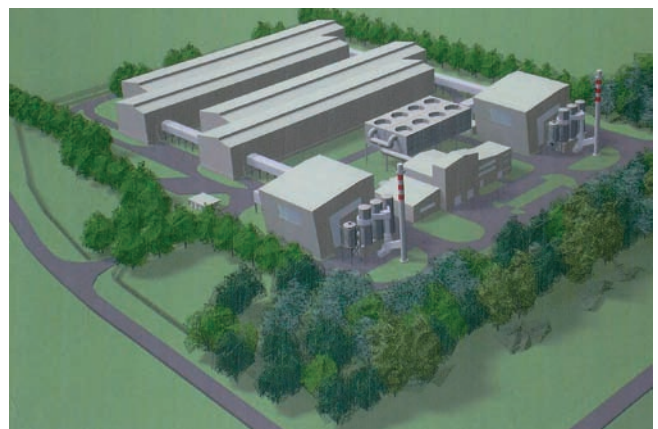
Other dangers also threaten this cultural landscape. A beautiful canyon-like valley is the target of a search for the most suitable site for a seven-kilometer-long reservoir. It is planned to create this massive rearrangement of nature within the buffer zone of the World Heritage site, on the outskirts of Abaujszántó in the valley of the Aranyos Creek. If it is constructed, a significant portion of the World Heritage site will be put in serious danger.

The third source of danger is expected to come from Slovakia. There are plans to erect a new straw-burning power plant right next to the border in Trebisov. Due to the prevailing winds the pollution from the power plant would cover the Tokaj wine region. If the project is completed it will not only endanger the World Heritage site, but also the vineyards that produce the grapes for the world famous Tokaj wine.

Enormous financial opportunities are inherent in energy production. It is not coincidental that the lobbies representing its interests have such great weight. Nor is it accidental that the alleged benefit for energy production is always able to push the efforts to defend the interests of historic preservation, construction regulations and environmental conservation into the background.



The first plan for the power station in the cultural landscape of Tokaj



...and the second one (?!)

Will the Project Being Implemented at Hajógyári Island Become a Model Development?

Most developments that damage cultural heritage may be traced back to an insufficient preparation of the plan. When the first drafts are in tune with the concerns of historic preservation and archaeology, then the new project can enjoy this special bonus without causing any disturbance to the investment program.

The Roman remains on Hajógyári Island in the Óbuda section of Budapest are an important part of the Limes Romanus, which is on Hungary's tentative list for nomination to the UNESCO World Heritage List (as a section of an international proposal). Therefore, the only projects that are acceptable on the island are those of a size and scale that will not endanger the scientific knowledge, preservation or presentation of any of the elements (both known and yet to be discovered) of these world-famous ancient remains. The preliminary development plan did not consider the area's archaeological assets. Because of the protests of the Hungarian National Committee of ICOMOS and the compromise that followed, the developer has accepted the responsibility to present the findings from the excavations at an international conference, and to consent to the positions of the convened experts. The developer has agreed to modify his plans on their basis. Following this an independent committee of experts will be created at the recommendation of ICOMOS. Their task will be to observe and supervise the proper protection of the archaeological remains during the course of the project. We have confidence in the fact that on the basis of the opinions of the committee, which is made up of noted professionals, there will

be the opportunity to present the valuable Roman ruins in a professional manner. If this cooperation proves to be successful, this process could become a model for the implementation of other similar projects in regards to the preservation of cultural heritage.

The Hungarian examples show that sensible urban development and established urban planning can provide one of the most important frameworks for historic preservation. It is no accident that great pressure is being exerted upon the drafter of the plan, since money is on the line. The examples above refer to challenges from recent times.

Due to the initiative of the UNESCO World Heritage Center, precisely on the basis of the lessons learned from these kinds of situations, and in the effort to avoid further similar instances, the "Vienna Memorandum" was adopted in 2005 as an official guideline, which among other things makes clear that:

"...Living historic cities, especially World Heritage cities, require a policy of city planning and management that takes conservation as one key point for conservation. In this process, the historic city's authenticity and integrity, which are determined by various factors, must not be compromised..."

continuing that

"...urban planning, contemporary architecture and preservation of the historic urban landscape should avoid all forms of pseudo-historical design, as they constitute a denial of both the historical and the contemporary alike. One historical view should not supplant others, as history must remain readable, while continuity of culture through quality interventions is the ultimate goal..."

and

"...Decision-making for interventions and contemporary architecture in a historic urban landscape demands careful consideration, a culturally and historic sensitive approach, stakeholder consultations and expert know-how. Such a process allows for adequate and proper action for individual cases, examining the spatial context between old and new, while respecting the authenticity and integrity of historic fabric and building stock..."

We think it is important to bring attention to development plans that are contrary to the goals of historic preservation. That is to say, plans can easily come from frightening notions. If business interests dominate the plan, then it will be built even if it causes irreparable damage.

Gergely Nagy
President
ICOMOS Hungary

Report on the Condition of the Old Jewish Quarter of Pest

Due to repeated transformations, historic alterations and urban developments that have occurred from the 18th to the 21st centuries we have inherited an extraordinary and uniquely valuable urban district where uniform construction from the first half of the 19th century has survived along the interior streets of a well-preserved organic 18th-century network of roads and squares. A neighborhood has survived here to this day defining the culture of the Jewish community that started to settle here in the middle of the 19th century and has remained here for nearly two centuries despite all the historic ordeals. Along with the Castle District and

the Downtown this Old Jewish Quarter of Pest is one of Budapest's oldest and most valuable architectural and historic ensembles.

Its individuality and significance is provided by its irregular, crooked streets that contrast with the neighboring historic districts of the city, by the varied division of plots and their construction, by the consistent architecture of 19th-century buildings recalling the neo-classical period, by the secretive network of passageways that are characteristic of the Jewish merchant's quarter, by the oriental mystique of the three major and two minor synagogues, by the outstanding works of Art Nouveau architecture found here, and by the unique combination of all these elements.

1980-2002

In the 1980s the first block reconstruction area was designated in this district, based on the judgment of its value at the time. The construction of offices that began in the 1980s, and the processes that began transforming the urban fabric in 1990 and have accelerated since 2002 – consisting of a series of irresponsible demolitions, and the replacement of these buildings with cheap, poor-quality new constructions that do not respect the established scale – have seriously disrupted the harmony of this unique architectural and cultural ensemble.

At the end of the 1980s the idea of constructing the proposed "Madách" Avenue as a pedestrian street along the model of Andrassy Avenue was reintroduced. This, however, does not meet the current standards and would endanger the unique character of the district. The urban regulatory plan related to the construction of the pedestrian street was first passed in 1990. According to the plan, the buildings along the pedestrian street – which would cut through the organic network of streets and valuable 19th-century buildings that have survived to this day – would be permitted to be several times larger than the current constructions. (The value of the measure indicating building density for traditional construction in the interior lots is 2-2.5, while in the plan this value would be 5.5-6. This same value in the protected historic district of Paris is 3.5.) The 18th-century streets, seven to nine meters wide and bordered by historic buildings, would have to serve as the new pedestrian street, which would be closed to automobile traffic and have parking garages above and under ground. This would have a disastrous effect on the streets crossing the two oldest roads parallel to the pedestrian street (Dob and Király Streets), if in addition to the 29 building lots already empty the demolition of a further 26 buildings prescribed in the plan were to occur. Apart from intruding on the historic arrangement of streets and lots, including the demolition of more than a thousand apartments, the only church in the capital serving the Romanian Orthodox community (since 1910) and the only ritual baths in the Jewish Quarter would also have been demolished according to the plan.

This plan, which was equally insensitive to cultural, architectural and religious values, was modified in 1999, but did not change in essence.

In 2001 another regulatory plan was prepared for the area around the Dohány Street Synagogue built in 1854 (this is Europe's largest functioning synagogue). This, similar to the 1990/1999 plan, continues to think in terms of demolition instead of rehabilitation aimed at preserving the area's character. The local government and the historic preservation agency have approved this regulatory plan as well.



Demolition of Dob Street



Complete transformation of some streets in the protected area: New buildings in Holló Street, in the center of the protected area



Sight plan of the new authorized zoning plan in the immediate vicinity of the Synagogue in Dohány Street

Neo-classical building waiting to be demolished in Király Street. At this site the local government wants to construct a building with 100 flats.



Demolition of historic buildings in Síp Street, close to the Synagogue in Dohány Street.

Demolition of historic houses in Síp utca, in the background the Synagogue can be seen



2002-2004

In 2002 the quarter, which is part of Budapest's 7th District, became part of the buffer zone for the Budapest World Heritage site when the site was expanded to include Andrassy Avenue. Despite this, the regulatory plans previously prepared and adopted were not suspended, even though they did not consider the area to have a character worthy of preservation, but instead classified it as a site for unrestrained real estate development.

In the time since the Budapest World Heritage site was expanded to include Andrassy Avenue and the site's buffer zone was demarcated (2002), developments in line with the outdated regulatory plans that are still in effect have even accelerated. Between 2002 and 2006 the 7th District municipal government sold 47 properties, along with demolition permits in most cases, to private investors on condition that the residents be removed from the historic buildings. The eviction of residents and the demolition in interior cross streets have begun, and therefore the irreplaceable buildings that preserved the original profile and character of the streets are missing from several of them. These intrusions are affecting or have affected precisely the most valuable aspects of the area, its organic structure and early bourgeois houses. Nor have they spared the characteristic residences from the turn of the 20th century, which contained factories and workshops for providing traditional Jewish services.

2004-2006

In the spring of 2004, after seeing the senseless destruction as well as the shoddiness and unacceptable scale of the new construction erected in place of the demolished buildings, a community movement was founded to save the Old Jewish Quarter of Pest. Due to the initiative of the organization "ÓVÁS!" ("PRESERVATION!"), in April 2004 the Hungarian Office of Cultural Heritage ordered that the "Old Jewish Quarter of Pest" as a section of the buffer zone of the protected Andrassy Avenue World Heritage Site receive temporary protected historic status, and in November 2004 it provided permanent historic district protective status for the area. In April 2005, 51 buildings were registered as historic structures, including buildings that would have been demolished according to the regulatory plans and the decisions of the local government. However, the regulatory plans that plainly endanger the character of the quarter have yet to be repealed to this day, despite their incompatibility with the area's protected status. Local government decisions are made, and demolition and construction permits are issued on the basis of the old plans.

In fact, in 2005 and 2006 another four lots were sacrificed for the site of the aforementioned pedestrian street. Furthermore, the approach and the parameters of the new plan for the only square located in the central part of the quarter, Klauzál Square, are along the same lines as the previous plans. Nevertheless, in 2005 the Management Plan for the World Heritage Site and its buffer zones was completed and accepted by the experts of the Hungarian Office of Cultural Heritage and of the Budapest municipal government. Unfortunately however, the recently re-drafted regulatory plans remain in sharp conflict with the approach and expectations of the Management Plan. To this day the Management Plan has not become a law, executive decree or Budapest city ordinance. Due to this, the expectations established in the Management Plan are ignored by the district government, whose interests lie in the demolition and construction of buildings that are out of scale.

Moreover, even the Hungarian Office of Cultural Heritage cannot enforce the provisions of the Management Plan, because its decisions during the approval of permits must correspond to the legally valid regulatory plans. A management organization has yet to be set up. Only the "ÓVÁS!" organization is recording and making an attempt to reign in the increased pace of large-scale changes.

Unfortunately, despite its status as a protected historic district, in reality the demolition of unprotected buildings within the buffer zone and its surrounding areas continues unabated, and construction permits are issued on the basis of plans that have seemingly – at least in public statements – been denounced by everyone. All of this is occurring in full knowledge of, but in spite of the fact that during the course of the previous decades large European cities have been rehabilitating their Jewish quarters without exception. Furthermore, these other cases occurred despite the lack of a surviving Jewish community still living there.

2006-2007

By 2006 the situation had further worsened. Today, in a portion of the interior blocks made up of Classicist, Historicist and Art Nouveau buildings nearly 40 % of the buildings are missing, or have been replaced by developments similar to housing projects. Certain streets are now unrecognizable. Since 2005 the "ÓVÁS!" organization has asked for a ban on alterations to the district until a

Demolition and construction activity in one of the streets of the protected area (Holló Street)



new regulatory plan and a rehabilitation program that conforms to the Management Plan's preservation requirements are created, but up until now in vain. They also have requested in vain the otherwise expected establishment of a Management Organization, or the legal enforcement of the Management Plan. Up to this point neither has happened.

The drafting of a new plan, through a joint commission between the City of Budapest and the 7th District, which would consider the Old Jewish Quarter of Pest a unified protected district, seemed to have begun at the end of 2006. However, currently the preliminary program for creating the plan has not even been accepted yet. Without the ordering of a ban on alterations and a radical reexamination of inappropriate earlier decisions, the preservation of the area's character is inconceivable. This is because, on the one hand construction and demolition permits that have been issued, but not yet utilized, are not rescinded – citing the rights acquired by the investors – and on the other hand it is due to the unchanged legal conditions in effect until the new plan is put into force (in one or one and a half years) that provide the opportunity for unwanted demolitions and development to occur based on the earlier plans. Here they have placed the rights acquired by the investors above the rights of the community. By the time the new plan is passed, and the rehabilitation or management organization is formed that has

been planned for years by the City of Budapest, the removal of the residents will have taken place. The buildings are being demolished, and construction orientated towards building large-scale apartment houses is continuing. Due to the lack of a rehabilitation plan and related over-development, the green spaces that currently exist – courtyards, gardens, yards and passageways – will be built over and lost, and the narrow streets will be choked with an intolerable amount of traffic.

The Hungarian National Committee of ICOMOS made a statement in 2006 calling attention to the protection of the area's character, and later set forth in a letter directed to the Mayor of Budapest that the introduction of a ban on alterations to the area is necessary until a new regulatory plan is completed and put into effect.

This large historic architectural ensemble with its 200 years of history, where the largest Jewish community in the cities of Central Europe has lived and where despite the horrors of 1944 they have remained in the streets and buildings of what had become a ghetto, will be destroyed in a few years before our eyes – if nothing happens to stop the destruction.

The Board of Directors of the
Hungarian National Committee of ICOMOS